



Six Years of Philadelphia GEAR UP

An Evaluation Report

**Prepared by
Research for Action**

Rebecca Reumann-Moore, Ph.D.

February 2006



RESEARCH for *ACTION*

Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based, non-profit organization engaged in education research and evaluation. Founded in 1992, RFA works with public school districts, educational institutions, and community organizations to improve the educational opportunities for those traditionally disadvantaged by race/ethnicity, class, gender, language/cultural difference, and ability/disability.

Research for Action is funded through grants from foundations and contracts for services from a range of organizations, including the School District of Philadelphia. For more information about RFA please go to our website, www.researchforaction.org.

Mission Statement

Through research and action, Research for Action seeks to improve the education opportunities and outcomes of urban youth by strengthening public schools and enriching the civic and community dialogue about public education. We share our research with educators, parent and community leaders, students, and policy makers with the goals of building a shared critique of educational inequality and strategizing about school reform that is socially just.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Research for Action (RFA) has been the evaluator of the Philadelphia GEAR UP program since its inception in 1999. GEAR-UP is a federally-funded grant program initiated through legislation by one of Philadelphia's own congressman, Chaka Fattah. GEAR UP aims to increase low-income students' access to post-secondary education. In 1999 the School District of Philadelphia was awarded \$28 million over five years to implement the program; the grant was later extended for a sixth and final year. The program was a "partnership" in which the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), together with the Philadelphia Education Fund, Philadelphia Futures, and Temple University, would work together to implement the program. The initiative had the goal of building the district's capacity to adopt and sustain successful GEAR UP programs at the conclusion of the grant.

Schools served by GEAR UP include eight neighborhood comprehensive high schools and their twenty feeder middle schools.¹ GEAR UP serves cohorts of students designated by grade level, with a new cohort added each year. The first cohort of students, which began 7th grade in the first year of GEAR UP, graduated from high school in 2005. In 2004-2005, GEAR UP served 18,440 students in grades seven through twelve. Twenty-four school-based staff served as direct service coordinators.

GEAR UP had three explicit primary goals: Enhancing Academic Support, Enhancing College Awareness, and Enhancing Family

and Community Involvement. This executive summary gives an overview of major challenges, key outcomes for each goal, and recommendations.

GEAR UP Context and Challenges

Program designers for college access programs such as GEAR UP are often faced with a difficult choice between serving a small number of students deeply with extensive supports and serving many or all more superficially. This was true in Philadelphia. GEAR UP's goal was to prepare all students at GEAR UP schools for college and to provide the necessary supports for them to get there. Schools were selected for participation in GEAR UP because they were located in federally designated Empowerment Zones with higher poverty rates than the city as a whole and with lower levels of academic performance than in Philadelphia's other public neighborhood high schools. While the amount of GEAR UP funding sounds vast (over \$7 million in 2004-2005 alone), it amounted to only \$425 per student. The per pupil amount was \$809 in year one of the program but funding did not keep up with the increase in the number of students served, hence the drop in per pupil allotment.

While there have been annual reports each of the past six years, this report and executive summary look at the entire six years of the GEAR UP project in Philadelphia. Over the course of the initiative, GEAR UP's major challenges included:

- Turmoil/turnover at the district and program levels.
- Centralized and bureaucratic contracting and payment processes.

¹During the last two years of the grant, three GEAR UP middle schools began a transition process to become small high schools.

- Weakened partnerships with lead partners and with community-based organizations (CBOs) and institutions of higher education (IHEs).
- Growing number of cohorts that meant an annual decrease in per pupil funding.
- Inadequate school infrastructure and leadership changes in schools.
- Difficult collaborations between guidance counselors and GEAR UP staff.
- High stakes testing environment.
- Lack of effective SDP structures for tracking college application and enrollment as well as post-secondary activity, which would have helped those directing this and future programs.
- GEAR UP generated some very strong programs to enhance students' academic preparation, especially those sponsored by Institutions of Higher Education. These programs were not scaled up to serve entire cohorts, or even large groups of students, however.
- Data on student outcomes are mixed but indicate that many GEAR UP students will not be academically well-prepared for college. Data indicate negligible impact on student attendance and that overall student standardized test scores remained very low, with just 28% and 13%, of the GEAR UP research cohort scoring at basic or above in the 11th grade PSSA reading and math tests, respectively. In contrast, by the end of 11th grade, the research cohort was more on target in terms of maintaining appropriate grade level than a comparison group. By the end of 11th grade, 75% of the research cohort had completed geometry and Algebra II, important milestones in a college preparatory course sequence. On the other hand, in interviews and surveys, many students and teachers said that many GEAR UP students likely would not be prepared for the academic rigors of college.
- GEAR UP schools continued to be characterized by high drop out rates common to urban schools. By June 2004, the end of the first cohort's 11th grade year, more than 30% of the research cohort was no longer enrolled in the district.

Key Outcomes

The following section examines each of GEAR UP's three major goal areas. It assesses the key outcomes for each goal area, as well as which of GEAR UP's key programs have been institutionalized by the school district.

Enhancing Academic Support

The goal of enhancing academic preparation was only minimally met both in terms of having a measurable impact on large numbers of GEAR UP students and in terms of implementing programs that affect more than sub-groups of GEAR UP students. This goal was a challenge throughout the initiative, in part because many of the factors affecting students' academic preparation were outside of GEAR UP's purview.

- The GEAR UP academic support programming that has been adopted by the district and will be sustained beyond the GEAR UP grant includes robotics programs and a support and mentoring program for all new teachers.

Enhancing College Awareness

College awareness was the strongest and most visible area of implementation throughout the years of GEAR UP. It also has the strongest record of institutionalization, i.e., multiple programs and initiatives in this area have been integrated into the district's structures and budget.

- The district institutionalized a number of GEAR UP college awareness efforts, including college visits for 7th and 10th graders, student success centers to coordinate college programming in high schools, administration of PSAT tests to all students, and the establishment of the Office of College and Career Awareness to coordinate all college awareness and support programs.
- GEAR UP has dramatically increased the numbers of students in GEAR UP schools who are visiting colleges, receiving information about college-going, and taking concrete steps towards college, particularly taking PSAT and SAT exams. While GEAR UP has had a strong impact in this area, it has not achieved some of the very ambitious numerical goals originally set, e.g. that all students would visit a college or that all would apply to a college.
- Students' college aspirations, measured through surveys, interviews and anecdotal data, have consistently been very high throughout the GEAR UP initiative.
- Spring 2005 student survey data indicated that 71% of 12th grade respondents had applied to at least one post-secondary institution and that, by late spring, 49% of students surveyed had received at least one acceptance. It appears likely that percentages of GEAR UP students applying to and enrolling in college have increased over pre-GEAR UP numbers, but there are gaps in district data collection in this area. A more reliable quantitative assessment of these outcomes will be available later in 2006 from the National Student Clearinghouse.

Enhancing Family and Community Involvement

Parent and community involvement has consistently been the most challenging GEAR UP goal, with the weakest implementation and poorest success. In the face of ambitious goals and ever increasing numbers of students to serve, GEAR UP's efforts focused mainly on work inside schools.

- Community involvement largely consisted of contracts with CBOs to provide services both in and out of school. All regions developed such program partnerships with CBOs; the GEAR UP program struggled at times with how to monitor and assess these services.
- GEAR UP did provide helpful support and information to some parents, but parent programming was not extensive. The most consistent form of parent involvement took the form of invitations for parents to attend a program orientation or a culminating event.

Recommendations

As outlined in this summary and in more detail in our full report, GEAR UP in Philadelphia faced many challenges during its six years. Many of these lay outside of the program's purview or were inherited obstacles that made implementation and success more difficult. GEAR UP has assisted students in learning about college, applying to college, visiting colleges and negotiating college acceptances, and related decision-making. We also know that GEAR UP students continue to drop out of school at nearly the same rate as their peers in other schools, that their academic performance remains low, and that their parents are only peripherally involved with GEAR UP. Because the majority of students' academic experience (key to preparing for college) takes place outside of GEAR UP, the program needs to target its work in order to build on and complement the school district's academic programming. Below are some recommendations which we think may help those directing these programs in their efforts to help Philadelphia's youth.

- Increase emphasis on strengthening students' academic skills; GEAR UP could both align its efforts to build on district academic programming and advocate for change where it is needed.
- Integrate academics and college awareness efforts as much as possible so that programming can address both goals.
- Develop better student tracking systems so that (a) student participation in GEAR UP and similar programs can be better assessed and (b) the district and schools can get a more accurate picture of students' application to, acceptances from, and enrollment in college over time.
- Reconsider the district's role as fiscal agent. Consider using a third party as fiscal agent for the grant, as do many other GEAR UP partnership grants.
- Either make parent involvement more central in terms of programming or focus parent involvement in very specific areas (e.g., certain kinds of workshops or information, connecting with parents of children in specific grades).
- Provide additional information about finances, including workshops that educate students' families in order to dispel myths about finances and encourage active family support to help students solve the financial challenges ahead.
- Provide clear delineation of roles and responsibilities of guidance counselors and GEAR UP coordinators.

Introduction & Methodology

Research for Action (RFA) has been the evaluator of the Philadelphia GEAR UP program since its inception in 1999. By 2004-2005, the School District of Philadelphia's GEAR UP program was in its sixth year of working to foster college awareness among middle and high school students in Philadelphia and to prepare them for post-secondary success. GEAR UP is a federally-funded grant program that was initiated through legislation authored by Congressman Chaka Fattah of Philadelphia. In 1999, the School District of Philadelphia was awarded \$28 million over five years to implement the GEAR UP program. The grant was later extended for a sixth and final year. The grant was designed to be a "partnership" grant in which the lead partners (the School District of Philadelphia [SDP] together with Temple University and two local non-profit organizations, the Philadelphia Education Fund and Philadelphia Futures), would work together to coordinate and implement the program. In addition, this initiative had the goal of building the district's capacity to adopt and sustain successful GEAR UP programs after the grant ended.

Schools served by GEAR UP include eight neighborhood comprehensive high schools and their twenty feeder middle schools.¹ GEAR UP serves cohorts of students designated by grade level, with a new cohort added each year. The first cohort of students, which began 7th grade in the first year of GEAR UP, graduated from high school in 2005. In its first year, GEAR UP served 4,180 students. In 2004-2005, GEAR UP served 18,440 students in grades seven through twelve.² Twenty-four school-based staff served as direct service coordinators;

with four managing coordinators, they provided a range of programming at the school and regional level.

GEAR UP has three explicit primary goals: (1) Enhancing Academic Support; (2) Enhancing College Awareness; and (3) Enhancing Family and Community Involvement. This summary evaluation draws on the findings from multiple years of reports about GEAR UP³ and assesses GEAR UP's progress toward meeting these three primary goals. This summary evaluation also assesses GEAR-UP's progress toward meeting the program's objectives and success indicators, as laid out in the GEAR UP Evaluation Plan.

Throughout its evaluation of Philadelphia GEAR UP, RFA has employed a mixed methods approach (i.e. quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis) to provide both formative and summative feedback about the initiative. Quantitative data collection included parent and student surveys, student outcomes data (e.g. attendance, course-taking patterns, standardized test scores) and program implementation data. Qualitative data collection included observations of high school classes, student enrichment programs and teacher professional development, interviews (e.g., with program staff, students, teachers) and shadowing students. Quantitative data provided a broad picture of GEAR UP's accomplishments and shortfalls; qualitative data provided a deeper understanding of student and teacher experience as well as interpretive data about what might have helped to support the accomplishments and bring about the shortfalls.

¹During the last two years of the grant, three GEAR UP middle schools began a transition process to become small high schools.

²In addition, approximately 250 6th graders in one high school feeder pattern are part of GEAR UP. All enrollment numbers are as of January 2005.

³See Appendix B for a list of these reports

Data in this report refer to several different subgroups of students. They are:

- GEAR UP's first cohort of students which began 7th grade in 1999 and graduated from high school in 2005. This group also includes students who joined this cohort by enrolling in GEAR UP schools between 1999 and 2005.
- The research cohort includes only those first cohort students who were enrolled in 7th grade in a GEAR UP middle school and remained in GEAR UP schools throughout high school.
- The comparison group includes students who began 7th grade in 1999 and were in 11th grade in 2003-2004 at a neighborhood, non-GEAR UP high school. These students attended middle schools demographically similar to GEAR UP middle schools.

More detailed information about research methodology can be found in individual reports, as well as in Appendix A, which details the major evaluation activities of years V and VI.

The report first sets the stage for a discussion of GEAR UP outcomes by presenting the challenges within which GEAR UP operated. It continues with a section on each of the three major program goals. Each section presents key outcomes, key program initiatives, and a chart providing an overview of objectives and indicators from the original evaluation plan, as well as grant-end outcomes related to those objectives. The report closes with recommendations for building on this initiative and for ongoing and future work in the area of college awareness and preparation.

GEAR UP Context and Challenges

In accordance with its mission, Philadelphia GEAR UP worked in low-performing schools with multiple challenges. This work occurred within a context where measures of high school outcomes remain stuck at low levels; the average PSSA scores of 11th graders in both reading and math were lower in 2005 than they had been in 2001.⁴

The initiative served large numbers of students, with participating students growing from 4,000 in Year One to over 18,000 in Year Six. Program planners set very ambitious objectives for making dramatic changes in all 28 middle and high schools. At the beginning of the project, the GEAR UP high schools lacked some key components of college preparatory programming; for example, some schools did not even offer courses students need to complete a college preparatory curriculum.

GEAR UP's major challenges included:

- **Turmoil/turnover at the district and program levels.** Ongoing change in district and program leadership and structure was a significant obstacle. Changes included a state takeover, district restructuring, and multiple leaders of the GEAR UP program.
- **Contracting process.** The school district's highly centralized and bureaucratic process resulted in severe delays in contract and budget approval, which undermined disbursement of funds, as well as the delivery of services.
- **Weakened partnerships with lead partners and with community-based organizations (CBOs) and institutions of higher education (IHEs).** Partnerships at the district and school level were undermined by both the turmoil at the district and the cumbersome contracting and payment process. Some CBOs and IHEs chose not to renew their contracts with the district. The GEAR UP lead partners played a stabilizing role amidst this change and brought the capacity to respond more quickly and flexibly to needs than could the large district bureaucracy. By year five the district chose to centralize leadership and the grant within the district and the role of some of the partners was significantly reduced. While district assumption of greater leadership fit the goal of institutionalization, it also happened in a way that cut short the full possibilities of the partnerships and its benefits to the district.
- **Growing number of cohorts meant a decrease in per pupil funding.** Each year the program design called for the addition of a new cohort of students. While the amount of funding increased over time, it did so at a slower rate. Funding went from \$809/pupil in Year One to \$425/student in Year Five.
- **Low school capacity and leadership change in schools.** Many schools lacked the infrastructure necessary to support GEAR UP. In addition, turnover rates for administrators and teachers were high at many schools. Some middle schools experienced major change when the district engaged outside managers for some schools as part of its restructuring.
- **Collaborating with counselors.** Though GEAR UP and school counselors shared similar goals, forging productive working relationships was not easy. Some positive examples stand out, but full collaboration was often undermined by a variety of factors including role conflict and counselors' work load and competing demands.

⁴ Philadelphia Public School Notebook, Fall 2005, Volume 13, No. 1, p. 4

- **High stakes testing environment.**
Increased focus on improving test scores and making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) negatively affected contracting and programming. For example, some principals became more reluctant to allow college trips and college awareness activities because they believed these distracted students and teachers from the goal of improving test scores and making AYP.
- **Lack of effective SDP structures for tracking college application and enrollment as well as post-secondary activity.**
The absence of this system makes it more difficult to gauge impact and to refine and adjust services.

GEAR UP's Three Major Goals

The following sections examine each of GEAR UP's three major goal areas. For each goal area, we lay out the key programs in that area over the six years of Philadelphia GEAR UP, as well as any institutionalization of those programs. Following the examination of key programs, a chart presents the Evaluation Plan objectives, success indicators, and an assessment of related outcomes. Several of the key programs incorporated all three goal areas; these are presented below.

- **After-school and Saturday programs.** Over the years, GEAR UP has offered a variety of after-school and Saturday programs, many through its IHE and CBO partners. These programs focused on academic support and enrichment and/or college awareness. They generally also had minimal parental involvement components, e.g., inviting parents to orientations or culminating events.
- **Summer Programs.** Offered by IHEs or CBOs, these programs usually had both academic and college awareness components. Some IHE programs were residential; these were often academically rigorous and tended to serve relatively small groups of students. These programs usually had the same type of parental involvement components as the after-school and Saturday programs.
- **Support and mentoring by coordinators.** GEAR UP coordinators provided support and mentoring for students, both formally and informally. Primary areas of support included both college awareness and academics; coordinators also involved parents through activities such as college trips and information sessions.

Enhancing Academic Support

Key outcomes for enhancing academic support

The goal of enhancing academic preparation was only minimally met both in terms of having a measurable impact on large numbers of GEAR UP students and in terms of implementing programs that affect more than sub-groups of GEAR UP students. This goal was a challenge throughout the initiative, in part because many of the factors affecting students' academic preparation were outside of GEAR UP's purview.

- The GEAR UP academic support programming that has been adopted by the district and will be sustained beyond the GEAR UP grant includes robotics programs and a support and mentoring program for all new teachers.
- GEAR UP did generate some very strong programs to enhance students' academic preparation, especially those sponsored by Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs). These programs were not scaled up to serve entire cohorts, or even large groups of students, however.
- Data on student outcomes are mixed but indicate that many GEAR UP students will not be academically well-prepared for college. Data indicate negligible impact on student attendance and that overall student standardized test scores remained very low, with just 28% of the GEAR UP research cohort scoring at basic or above in the 11th grade PSSA reading test and only 13% scoring above basic on the PSSA math test. Some data sets did show more positive trends. By the end of 11th grade, the research cohort was more on target in terms of maintaining appropriate grade level than a comparison group. By the end of 11th grade, 75% of the research cohort had completed geome-

try and Algebra II, important milestones in a college preparatory course sequence. On the other hand, in interviews and surveys, many students and teachers said that many GEAR UP students likely would not be prepared for the academic rigors of college.

- GEAR UP schools continued to be characterized by high drop out rates common to urban schools. Estimates by the school district and outside researchers peg the overall district dropout rate at somewhere between 33% and 50%. By June 2004, the end of the first cohort's 11th grade year, at least 30% of the research cohort was no longer enrolled in the district.

Key programs for enhancing academic support

- **In-School Academic Support Programming.** Examples include tutoring in selected middle schools and high schools offered by GEAR UP's university partners; in-school writing centers offered by university partners; report card conferences for 9th graders after they receive their first high school report card. Temple University, the primary provider of tutoring, hopes to continue some tutoring work in schools through its recently created Temple Mentors program.
- **Robotics.** After-school and in-school robotics programs have been operating for several years in GEAR UP middle schools. A 2004 report⁵ indicated that robotics students enrolled and succeeded in higher level mathematics at a significantly higher rate than other district students. Several new three-year partnerships will sustain the robotics program beyond the life of the GEAR UP grant.

- **Adjunct Faculty Supporting New Teachers.** The Adjunct Faculty Program, run by the Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF), provided support and professional development to new teachers in the GEAR UP schools. It sought to improve teacher retention and preparation. The district has now institutionalized this program by creating its own similar support and mentoring program for new teachers.
- **Professional Development for Teachers.** Professional development for teachers consisted mainly of small programs; it was never scaled up to reach the majority of teachers in GEAR UP schools. In recent years, PEF provided writing professional development for teachers, including sessions focused on helping teachers integrate college-level writing into their courses. CBOs and IHEs also sometimes provided professional development at individual schools or for small groups drawn from multiple schools.

⁵ Annual Performance Report for Partnership and State Projects. (2005). School District of Philadelphia.

Enhancing Academic Support - Outcomes Chart

Objective	Success Indicator	Outcomes
1. Enhance the qualifications of teachers in all targeted grade levels to teach college-preparatory courses.	1.1 75 % of the targeted teachers will participate and rate the content courses' effectiveness in preparing them to teach college prep courses.	1.1 This numerical target was not met. Professional development for teachers was not a major focus for GEAR UP. GEAR UP provided various small scale and effective professional development over the years, however, it was not scaled up to reach large quantities of teachers in the GEAR UP schools/grades. GEAR UP teachers were encouraged to participate in school district professional development.
2. Provide comprehensive array of early intervention student support services, both in and out of school.	2.1 All participating students will have access to the individualized early intervention student support services.	2.1 While all students in GEAR UP schools had access to services, the large numbers of GEAR UP students (16,797 by year 5) precluded offering a “comprehensive array” of “individualized” services to all students. In the Spring, 2004 student survey, 87% of 11th grade survey respondents (86% of 12th graders in 2005) and 83% of 8th graders surveyed reported participating in at least one GEAR UP activity in high school and middle school, respectively. 30% of 8th graders reported participating in 5 or more activities. Given the large numbers of students in the cohort, in later years, GEAR UP chose to focus some services on particular grades (e.g. 9th grade report card conferences and 12th grade graduation assessments).
3. Increase the percentage of students in targeted schools successfully completing a full sequence of college preparatory courses.	3.1 By the end of the three years, 75% of the participating students in middle grades schools will have successfully completed an Algebra or Pre-Algebra course. 3.2 In six years, 75% of the participating students in targeted high schools will have successfully completed the college preparatory sequence on time.	3.1 The specific algebra goals were not met. In 2004-2005, only one GEAR UP middle school offered algebra. During the initiative, the middle school math curriculum has gone through several changes. In 04-05, the district was using math reform curricula, which does not offer algebra as a specific course but instead provides a more integrated approach. As of 2005-2006, algebra was required in 8th grade; thus future students will certainly meet this goal. 3.2 Interim data indicated that GEAR UP 11th graders from the research cohort were on track to meet this objective for key math courses: 88% of this group had taken geometry and 75% had taken Algebra II. Some students do not have access to certain advanced courses because their high school does not offer them.

Enhancing Academic Support - Outcomes Chart *continued*

Objective	Success Indicator	Outcomes
4. Improve the academic performance of participating students	4.1 After two and five years participating in GEAR UP, student attendance rates will have increased in GEAR UP schools in the respective grades . (8, 11)	4.1 Data show little change in attendance rates. There has been a district-wide push for increased attendance with some improvements in middle school and high school. At most GEAR UP middle schools, attendance differences between 98-99 (pre-GEAR UP) and 02-03 for 8th graders were negligible. A comparative study in 2003-2004 found no differences in attendance in GEAR UP schools and other district schools.
	4.2 After two years, 75% of the participating 8th graders will meet the promotion requirements.	4.2 This objective has consistently been met.
	4.3 After five years there will be an increase in the number successfully completing 11th grade in every GEAR UP high school	4.3 Analysis of comparative data of promotion rates indicates that the GEAR UP 1st research cohort was more on target in terms of maintaining appropriate grade level than a comparison group. 63% of GEAR UP students were in 11th grade as compared with 57% of the comparison group.
	4.4 After five years 75% of the participating students will score at the Basic Performance Level or above on PSSA and TERRANOVA.	4.4 This objective was not met. 28% of the GEAR UP research cohort scored at basic or above in PSSA 11th grade reading and 13% at basic or above in PSSA 11th grade math tests in spring 2004.
5. Increase the rate of retention for new teachers who have received support in targeted schools.	5.1 Provide services to new middle and high school teachers.	5.1-2 These objectives have been met. A GEAR UP program coordinated by the Philadelphia Education Fund provided support for new teachers. Retention data for teachers (with 2-3 years experience) served by the PEF program in 2002-2003 showed a 94% retention rate. This program has been institutionalized, with a similar district program now in place for first year teachers. The district reports that retention rates for teachers in their first year on the job jumped from 73 to 91 percent between the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years.
	5.2 Increase the rate at which teachers who received support remain teaching in the targeted grades in program schools.	

Enhancing College Awareness

Key outcomes for enhancing college awareness

College awareness was the strongest and most visible area of implementation throughout the years of GEAR UP. It also has the strongest record of institutionalization, i.e., multiple programs and initiatives in this area have been integrated into the district's structures and budget.

- The district institutionalized a number of GEAR UP college awareness efforts, including college visits for 7th and 10th graders, student success centers to coordinate college programming in high schools, administration of PSAT tests to all students, and the establishment of the Office of College and Career Awareness to coordinate all college awareness and support programs.
- Students' college aspirations, measured through surveys, interviews and anecdotal data, have consistently been very high throughout the GEAR UP initiative.
- GEAR UP has dramatically increased the numbers of students in GEAR UP schools who are visiting colleges, receiving information about college-going, and taking concrete steps towards college, particularly taking PSAT and SAT exams. While GEAR UP has had a strong impact in this area, it has not achieved some of the very ambitious numerical goals originally set, e.g. that all students would visit a college or that all would apply to a college.
- Spring 2005 student survey data indicated that 71% of 12th grade respondents had applied to at least one post-secondary institution and that, by late spring, 49% of students surveyed had received at least

one acceptance. It appears likely that percentages of GEAR UP students applying to and enrolling in college have increased over pre-GEAR UP numbers, but there are gaps in district data collection in this area. A more reliable quantitative assessment of these outcomes will be available later in 2006 from the National Student Clearinghouse.

Key programs for enhancing college awareness

- **Enhanced College Visits.** GEAR UP sponsored college trips from the start of the grant; over time, it focused on delivering "enhanced" visits which provided more than a campus tour and offered students a chance to attend a college class and to interact with students and professors. Temple University, a GEAR UP lead partner, played a large role in developing the enhanced visits and coordinating the program. College visits have been institutionalized by the district, which now has the goal of providing all 7th and 10th graders with college visits.
- **Ongoing College Awareness Activities.** GEAR UP offered a variety of college information and awareness activities including assemblies and small group informational programming about financial aid and other aspects of the college-going process. GEAR UP students also participated in other activities including college fairs and events with motivational speakers. College awareness programming was also integrated into many other program offerings including academic support programs. During GEAR UP, the district established the Office of College and Career Awareness to coordinate all college awareness and support programs. The district has now added this office to its operating budget.

- **Student Success Centers.** Student Success Centers bring all college awareness and support organizations in a school together in one physical location in order to better coordinate services to students. They began functioning during the final two years of the grant. In year six, these centers operated in seven GEAR UP high schools. The centers began as a GEAR UP pilot project and the district decided to expand the model, which now has joint district and foundation funding for its next phase.
- **PSAT, SAT, and PSSA Programs.** GEAR UP supported programs to pay for all GEAR UP students to take the PSAT and SAT as well as test preparation programs. In addition, GEAR UP sponsored Saturday PSSA Academies to assist GEAR UP schools in making AYP. PSAT-taking has been institutionalized; the district is mandating that 10th and 11th graders take the test during the school day.
- **Professional Development for Counselors.** GEAR UP provided occasional professional development for counselors. Counselors from GEAR UP schools also participated in ongoing district professional development.

Enhancing College Awareness - Outcomes Chart

Objective	Success Indicator	Outcomes
6. Establish or expand effective partnerships between schools and institutions of higher education to foster a college-going culture within targeted schools.	<p>6.1 Each participating region will establish a partnership with at least one institution of higher education (IHE).</p> <p>6.2 Documentation that effective partnerships have been instituted.</p> <p>6.3 IHEs are providing services.</p>	6.1-6.3 These objectives have been met during the period of the grant. All regions established partnerships with IHEs. In 2004-2005, individual regions had between 11 and 29 partnerships with IHEs. IHE-provided services include enhanced college visits, mentoring, tutoring, financial aid workshops, participating in fairs, college residential summer programs, and a college prep program for high-achieving students. It is unclear to what extent this array of partnerships will continue beyond the grant.
7. Engage targeted students in high quality educational experiences at college campuses and in a comprehensive array of other college awareness - enhancing interventions.	<p>7.1 During the five years of GEAR UP, all participating students will have at least two extended college visits (1 in MS, 1 in HS).</p> <p>7.2 During the five years of GEAR UP, the number of IHEs offering campus-based programs to students from GEAR UP schools will double.</p>	<p>7.1 GEAR UP has made great efforts to provide students with college visits; many students have benefited. It is unlikely that all participating students had a college visit. In spring 2004 student surveys, 56% of 11th grade survey respondents and 51% of 8th grade survey respondents reported college visits (during high school and middle school respectively). In spring 2005, 63% of 12th graders surveyed reported a college visit during high school.</p> <p>7.2 This objective has been met. As reported above, in 2005, the 4 regions had between 11 and 29 partnerships with IHEs. Most of these developed during GEAR UP.</p>
8. Enhance the knowledge and skills of guidance counseling in all targeted schools.	8.1 All the college guidance counselors in the participating schools will participate.	8.1 In 2005, this objective was met for high school counselors, who all attended a day-long district PD session. GEAR UP has had limited kinds of outreach and professional development for counselors over the years and a small number of counselors have been highly involved. However, coordination between GEAR UP and counselors remained an area of challenge in many schools.

Enhancing College Awareness - Outcomes Chart *continued*

Objective	Success Indicator	Outcomes
9. Increase the proportion of students in targeted schools taking the PSAT/SAT or ACT college entrance exams.	9.1 After four years 75% of the participating 10th grade students will be taking PSAT exams and after five years, 75% of participating 11th graders will take college entrance exams.	9.1 At most GEAR UP schools, there have been dramatic increases in the percentage of students taking these tests. When the 1st GEAR UP cohort reached 10th grade in 2002-2003, student participation in the PSAT increased by 500% or more at every GEAR UP school. At 6 of 7 high schools, fewer than 20 students had taken the PSAT the previous year. In 02-03, 3 of the schools had over 200 students take the test and 2 over 300. ⁶ College board data indicated that 50% of GEAR UP 10th graders took the PSAT in 2004-2005.
10. Increase the proportion of students formally submitting at least one college application.	10.1 After six years all participating students will submit a college application and FAFSA.	10.1 This goal was not met, although the percentages likely increased. Data from the May 2005 12th grade survey indicated that 71% of those surveyed had applied to at least one post secondary institution and 49% received at least one acceptance. Sixty-five percent said that they had applied for at least one form of financial aid. All GEAR UP students were to participate in senior financial aid workshops and FAFSA programs were held in every school. Thirty-nine percent of 12 grade survey respondents said they had completed the FAFSA. While the proportion of students submitting college applications has likely increased, the district has not systematically collected data about college applications.
11. The number of Philadelphia high school graduates enrolling in selected state colleges and universities will increase compared to previous years.	11.1 Higher numbers of Philadelphia enrollment compared to previous years	11.1 During 2006, the district should gain access to data about GEAR UP student enrollment rates in a large group of colleges through a contract with the National Student Clearinghouse.

⁶A small high school with 159 12th graders experienced a jump from 1 to 73 students taking the test.

Enhancing Family and Community Involvement

Key outcomes for enhancing family and community involvement

Parent and community involvement has consistently been the most challenging GEAR UP goal, with the weakest implementation and poorest success. In the face of ambitious goals and ever increasing numbers of students to serve, GEAR UP's efforts focused mainly on work inside schools.

- Community involvement largely consisted of contracts with CBOs to provide services both in and out of school. All regions developed such program partnerships with CBOs; the GEAR UP program struggled at times with how to monitor and assess these services.
- GEAR UP did provide helpful support and information to some parents, but parent programming was not extensive. The most consistent form of parent involvement took the form of invitations for parents to attend a program orientation or a culminating event.

Key programs for enhancing family and community involvement

Unlike the other two program goals, this area did not have an identifiable group of core programs. The most extensive program efforts were devoted to the other two goals.

- To the extent community involvement was nurtured by GEAR UP, it largely took place through contractual relationships with community organizations. Involvement with GEAR UP did impact some CBOs in terms of their relationships with the District and their programming. Some began to integrate academics into their programming in new ways as a result of their GEAR UP participation. Some developed new relationships with schools and regions. It is unclear what shape these relationships will take or how well they can be sustained once GEAR UP funding ends.
- As noted above, family involvement was also not a major emphasis. Family members were sometimes included in program events, such as orientations and culminations of summer or after-school programs, college trips and financial aid workshops.

Enhancing Family & Community Involvement - Outcomes Chart

Objective	Success Indicator	Outcomes
12. Establish and/or expand effective partnerships between schools and community-based organizations to provide the supports which the targeted students need to succeed in preparing for college.	12.1 Each participating region will establish a partnership with at least one community-based organization.	12.1-12.3 These objectives have been met during the period of the grant. All regions have had partnerships with CBOs during the course of the grant. During 2003-2004, regions had between one and six such partnerships. CBOs provided services including after-school and summer programs, parent workshops, home visits, career and leadership training, truancy prevention, curriculum support, and family involvement planning. During 2004-2005, three of four regions had partnerships with CBOs providing services such as mentoring, career and health workshops, summer and after-school programs. It is unclear to what extent this array of partnerships will continue beyond the grant.
	12.2 Documentation that effective partnerships have been instituted.	
	12.3 CBOs are providing services.	
13. Develop meaningful relationships between parents/guardians and school staff that support the academic achievement and college awareness of targeted students.	13.1 75% of the students and their families, will respond positively to questions regarding the relationships formed with school staff.	13.1-3. This objective was not fully met. GEAR UP did provide information to parents at school events. Many IHE or CBO programs invited parents to a culminating event or an orientation. On the 2005 parent survey,* 62% of parents rated relationships with school staff positively while 34% said they had no relationship with staff. <i>* Note: The parent survey had a very low response rate, however the parents that did respond were likely on the higher end of a continuum of involvement.</i>
	13.2 At back-to-school nights, report card conferences, and other significant school events, GEAR UP staff will provide information to parents about college-going and GEAR UP services.	
	13.3 All student enrichment and support programs will have a mechanism for involving parents.	
14. Increase the ability and desire of targeted students' families to participate in the college selection, application, and financial aid process.	14. 75% of the students and parents will express satisfaction with their level of knowledge of the college application process.	14. While GEAR UP provided helpful support and information to some parents, this numerical target was not met. Parent programming was not extensive. On the 2005 parent survey, 56% of parents were satisfied with their amount of knowledge about the college application process and 44% were not satisfied.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Program designers for college access programs such as GEAR UP often are faced with a difficult choice between serving a small number of students deeply with extensive supports and serving many or all more superficially. This was true in Philadelphia. GEAR UP's goal was to prepare **all** children at GEAR UP schools for college and to provide the necessary supports for them to get there. GEAR UP schools were selected because they were located in federally designated Empowerment Zones with higher poverty rates than the city as a whole and with lower levels of academic performance than in Philadelphia's other public neighborhood high schools. While the amount of GEAR UP funding sounds vast (over \$7 million in 2004-2005), it amounted to only \$425 per student by year 5 of the grant. GEAR UP's other key challenges, including ongoing change in district, program, and school leadership and structure, are enumerated above.

Of GEAR UP's three major goals, enhancing college awareness was the most fully implemented and its programs and initiatives the most broadly institutionalized. Many students became enthusiastic about going to college and a range of initiatives helped many students learn about college and visit college campuses. GEAR UP provided tangible support, especially through Student Success Centers and GEAR UP coordinators, to help students apply to college and negotiate college acceptances and decision-making. Programming for the goal of enhancing academic support featured strong individual initiatives but did not reach students broadly at a deep level; student outcomes data (e.g. PSSA scores) raise significant concerns about GEAR UP students' preparedness for college level work. Enhancing family and community involvement proved to be the weakest area of implementation. Community involvement most often took the

form of contracts with CBOs. Services to parents were not extensive; they did include some access to college visits and informational workshops (e.g. financial aid) as well as invitations to program orientations and culminating events.

The following recommendations provide suggestions for building on GEAR UP's successes and addressing challenges in order to strengthen future programming.

Improve documentation

Develop better record-keeping and student tracking systems so that (a) student participation in GEAR UP and similar programs can be better assessed and (b) the district and schools can get a more accurate picture of students' application to, acceptances from, and enrollment in college over time. In addition, it would be very useful if the district were able to collect some data about students' post-secondary activity and success.

Create an archive of materials and resources from the current GEAR UP grant so that using the lessons learned during the grant does not depend simply on the presence of individuals who were there. The district, as well as current and future college access programs, can then build on the programs, experience, and learning from this grant in order to strengthen the implementation of future GEAR UP grants and related efforts. Some relevant documents have already been created (e.g., Temple's handbook for Enhanced College Visits). Handbooks or other kinds of resources could be created about other programs (e.g., tutoring, report card conferences, robotics).

Cultivate partnerships to extend GEAR UP's efficacy

Prioritize continued development and nurturing of partnerships with other groups and programs with shared and overlapping goals to leverage additional resources and strengthen GEAR UP's impact. Such groups could include institutions of higher education, community-based organizations, other college access programs, as well as district college access and academic enrichment initiatives.

Reconsider the district's role as fiscal agent. Consider using a third party as fiscal agent for the grant. Nationwide, most GEAR UP partnership grants are administered by IHEs or local education funds. This could ameliorate some of the serious delays in contract approval and payment which, in some cases, undermined partnership relationships and delivery of services.

Strengthen the impact and institutionalization of GEAR UP's three goals

Integrate academics and college awareness efforts as much as possible so that programming can address both goals. For example, all college visits should be "enhanced" (i.e., include visits to classes or conversations with professors); enrichment programs should address both goals; tutoring programs that involve college students provide academic support and opportunities for high schoolers to learn more about college from college student role models; report card conferences can help students identify and develop strategies to address current academic needs, and educate students about courses needed for college.

Increase emphasis on strengthening students' academic skills; GEAR UP could both align its efforts to build on district academic programming and advocate for change where it is needed. Given that the vast majority of students' academic experience (key to preparing for college) is outside of GEAR UP's purview, GEAR UP must coordinate its efforts to build on and complement the school district's academic curricula and programs. In turn, schools need to be able to integrate GEAR UP staff into academic aspects of school life. Advocate to make sure high schools are offering all the necessary college preparatory courses.

Provide clear delineation of roles and responsibilities of guidance counselors and GEAR UP coordinators. Identify possibilities for collaboration between the two groups, e.g. high school orientation programs, financial aid and other college awareness information sessions and outreach, and the college application process itself, which both groups are currently involved in.

Either make parent involvement more central in terms of programming or focus parent involvement in very specific areas (e.g., certain kinds of workshops or information, connecting with parents of children in specific grades). The current situation, wherein parent involvement is a major program goal but without the action or programming, does not serve parents or the program well.

Programs that show promise need to be integrated into school and district structures and funding sources if they are to endure longer than the grant monies. Planning and strategy efforts need to begin early in the life of the grant. The School District of Philadelphia can point to a number of ways that GEAR UP has resulted in changes or additions to its programs and

structures. The district should evaluate what other promising GEAR UP initiatives could still be institutionalized.

Address gaps and build on promising practices

The following recommendations build on data presented in other RFA reports, particularly, *Off to college?: An examination of the postsecondary aspirations, plans, and preparations of the class of 2005 and first cohort of GEAR UP*.⁷

Conduct outreach targeted towards male students. Survey data indicated gender differences in college aspiration and decision-making that are well-substantiated in the research literature. In the light of these, make an effort to conduct additional outreach to male students and to create some all male and female workshops or trips.

Help more students to find extra curricular activities that meet their needs. In the GEAR UP survey data, involvement in extra curricular activities correlates with positive outcomes in terms of active participation in the college preparation and application process.

Provide additional information about finances, including workshops that educate students' families in order to dispel myths about finances and encourage active family support to help students solve the financial challenges ahead. Students cited lack of information about finances as a problem and concern about finances as the primary barrier to college-going.

Expand GEAR UP's focus to include the full range of post-secondary education and training options for high school students. Though GEAR UP's primary focus should remain college preparation, some students will benefit from learning about additional options. As students enter their final years of high school, GEAR UP could coordinate with the district to make sure that students learn about an extensive menu of post-secondary training, educational, work, and apprenticeship options.

Provide support and resources to district graduates in their first year of college.

While it is hard to imagine funding such a program under current conditions, given the pressing needs of district high school students, providing focused programming for district graduates making the transition to college could be a very helpful support. Some college access programs, e.g. Philadelphia Futures, do provide such services. For example, workshops or mini-conferences in late summer or during fall or winter holidays could provide opportunities for sharing coping and study strategies. Workshops could also offer resources for college students to access about social or academic concerns and for student networking with peers.

⁷ See Appendix B for fuller citation.

Appendix A

Year 5 - 6 major research & evaluation activities

Year 6

Research for Action (RFA) assessed GEAR UP's programs through five major evaluation activities, described below. More detail on research methodology can be found in the individual reports.⁸

- **12th grade student survey:** In the spring of 2005, GEAR UP coordinators administered surveys to approximately 1,071 twelfth grade students in GEAR UP high schools. This constituted a response rate of 45%. The surveys assessed student goals and expectations, participation in GEAR UP, perceived supports for and barriers to college, knowledge about the college application process and financial aid, and what colleges students had applied to and been accepted at.
- **9th grade student survey:** In the spring of 2005, GEAR UP coordinators administered surveys to approximately 723 ninth grade students in GEAR UP middle schools. This constituted a response rate of 17%. The surveys assessed student goals and expectations, participation in GEAR UP, perceived supports for and barriers to college and their preparations and expectations for high school.
- **Parent survey:** In the spring of 2005, GEAR UP coordinators distributed surveys to parents at GEAR UP middle and high schools. Five-hundred and fifty-three parents (out of an estimated 18,400 parents) completed surveys.⁹ This reflects a response rate of 3%. Surveys assessed

parent contact with the GEAR UP program as well as their aspirations toward higher education for their children.

- **Focus Group Interviews with Cohort One 12th graders:** Focus group interviews were conducted with 50 twelfth graders at four GEAR UP high schools. Focus group participants were all highly involved in GEAR UP and other college preparation activities.
- **Annual Performance Report:** RFA provided support to the School District of Philadelphia in its GEAR UP federal grant reporting requirements on the Annual Performance Report. RFA addressed the objectives laid out in the multi-year evaluation plan using data from the School District and its partners combined with data collected through the above evaluation activities.

Year 5

RFA assessed GEAR UP's programs through six major evaluation activities, described below. More detail on research methodology can be found in the individual reports.

- **11th grade student survey:** In the spring of 2004, GEAR UP coordinators administered surveys to approximately 2,381 eleventh grade students in GEAR UP high schools. 921 were returned for a response rate of 39%. The surveys assessed student goals and expectations, participation in GEAR UP, perceived supports for and barriers to college and knowledge about the college application process and financial aid.
- **8th grade student survey:** In the spring of 2004, GEAR UP coordinators administered surveys to approximately 3260 eighth grade students in GEAR UP middle schools. 1977 were returned for a response rate of 60%. The surveys assessed student

⁸ RFA produced 11 reports between 2003 and 2005. See Appendix B for a full list.

⁹ No exact figures on the number of GEAR UP parents exist. The response rate is calculated using the number of GEAR UP students as an estimate of the number of GEAR UP parents.

goals and expectations, participation in GEAR UP, perceived supports for and barriers to college, and their preparations and expectations for high school.

- **Parent survey:** In the spring of 2004, GEAR UP coordinators distributed surveys to parents at GEAR UP middle and high schools. Six hundred ninety-nine parents (out of an estimated 16,800 parents) completed surveys.¹⁰ This reflects a response rate of 4%. Surveys assessed parent contact with the GEAR UP program as well as their aspirations toward higher education for their children.
- **Student outcomes analysis:** RFA analyzed selected outcomes for the first cohort of GEAR UP. These included (1) student attendance, (2) promotion/grade level of students, (3) course-taking patterns, and (4) PSSA scores. The analysis compared the data on the GEAR UP cohort with a comparison group of students from middle schools deemed to be most equivalent to those of the GEAR UP students.
- **Interviews with key stakeholders:** For this research, RFA conducted two rounds of interviews with 36 people. Nine interviews took place during spring 2004 and 27 during fall 2004. The initial group of nine was comprised of key GEAR UP staff, district staff, and partners. Round two interviewees were chosen to represent different roles within GEAR UP (e.g., school-based staff, representatives from universities and community based organizations and others) as well as gender and ethnic diversity and experience in different school levels and regions. Interviewees included principals (5), teachers (4), counselors (4), representatives from community-based organizations (CBOs) (3), representatives from

institutions of higher education (IHEs) (3), University-affiliated program staff (4), district central office GEAR UP staff (2), GEAR UP managing and direct service coordinators (6), and GEAR UP lead partners (5).

- **Annual Performance Report:** RFA provided support to the School District of Philadelphia in its GEAR UP federal grant reporting requirements on the Annual Performance Report. RFA addressed the objectives laid out in the multi-year evaluation plan using data from the School District and its partners combined with data collected through the above evaluation activities.

¹⁰ See preceding footnote.

Appendix B

Philadelphia GEAR UP Evaluation Products

U.S. Department of Education GEAR UP Annual Performance Report for Partnership and State Projects, multiple years.¹¹

Off to College? An Examination of the Postsecondary Aspirations, Plans, and Preparations of the Class of 2005 and First Cohort of GEAR UP

Kristine S. Lewis, Ph.D.,
Tracey Hartmann, Ph.D.
April 2006

A Report on the 2005 Philadelphia GEAR UP Survey of 9th Grade Students
Gretchen E. L. Suess, M.A. with
Rebecca Reumann-Moore, Ph.D.
August 2005

Philadelphia GEAR UP Year V Summary Report
Tracey Hartmann, Ph.D.
June 2005

Moving into High Gear: An Examination of the Successes, Challenges, and Legacy of GEAR UP in the School District of Philadelphia
Kristine Lewis, Ph.D.,
Rebecca Reumann-Moore, Ph.D.
May 2005

Selected Outcomes for GEAR UP Cohort 1 Students Five Years into the GEAR UP Program
Rebecca Reumann-Moore, Ph.D., RFA &
David Kutzik, Ph.D., Kutzik Associates
February 2005

A Report on the 2004 Philadelphia GEAR UP Survey of 11th Grade Students
Tracey Hartmann, Ph.D., RFA
Rebecca Reumann-Moore, Ph.D., RFA &
David Kutzik, Ph.D., Kutzik Associates
January 2005

A Report on the 2004 Philadelphia GEAR UP Survey of 8th Grade Students
Tracey Hartmann, Ph.D.
January 2005

Year 4 of Philadelphia GEAR UP: A Snapshot of participation and impact at the high school level
Rebecca Reumann-Moore, Ph.D., RFA
Marcine Pickron-Davis, Ph.D., RFA &
David Kutzik, Ph.D., Kutzik Associates
November 2003

"To Find a Way to College:" Examining Promising Practices in GEAR UP Student Programs
Rebecca Reumann-Moore, Ph.D.,
Hitomi Yoshida, M.S. Ed.
May 2003

Counselors and GEAR UP: Investigating Roles and Connections Within Philadelphia GEAR UP Schools
Rebecca Reumann-Moore, Ph.D., RFA
Marcine Pickron-Davis, Ph.D., RFA &
David Kutzik, Ph.D., Kutzik Associates
January 2003

Aiming Towards College: GEAR UP Student Perspectives on the Transition to High School, GEAR UP and College
Rebecca Reumann-Moore, Ph.D. RFA
Hitomi Yoshida RFA with
Marcine Pickron-Davis, Ph.D., RFA
Matthew Pearson, M. Ed., RFA &
David Kutzik, Ph.D., Kutzik Associates
January 2003

¹¹ All GEAR UP programs are required to submit an Annual Performance Report (APR) to the U.S. Department of Education. RFA contributed survey data to the report as well as a chart listing the objectives of Philadelphia GEAR UP and the program's progress in meeting those objectives.

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Rebecca Reumann-Moore has worked in a range of educational settings, particularly adult literacy programs. Her dissertation examined a literacy program that sought to enact participatory approaches in the classroom and in program management and administration. At RFA, she has worked on a range of projects with many overlapping themes including using professional development as part of a larger change initiative; building effective partnerships between non-profit organizations and schools; building community in large educational institutions; and experimenting with different approaches to catalyze pedagogical and curricular change.



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